

Manorialism: Duties of a Villein

Manorialism is another term used to describe medieval European civilization. It concerns the life around the manor houses that were the centers of life in the countryside. Manors were owned by feudal lords whose income derived, at least in good part, from the work of free peasants and dependent serfs (*villeins*).¹

This document, from England in 1307, delineates the duties required of a villein, John of Cayworth, to the lord of the manor, Battle Abbey. What duties does the abbey require of John of Cayworth? What does he get in return? In what ways is this document similar to the previous one? In what ways is it different?

Thinking Historically

How is the social status of John of Cayworth different from that of Bernard Atton in the previous selection? What would you imagine about the differences in their economic welfare?

What would be the modern equivalent of this document? Would you call that modern equivalent economic, political, social, or cultural? Which word best characterizes this document?

They say that John of Cayworth holds one house and thirty acres of land, and he owes 2 s.¹ a year at Easter and Michaelmas, and he owes one cock and two hens at Christmas worth 4 s.

And he ought to harrow for two days at the sowing at Lent with one man and his own horse and harrow, the value of the work is 4 d.;² and he receives from the lord on each day three meals worth 3 d.; and the lord will thus lose 1 d.; and so this harrowing is worth nothing to the service of the lord.

And he ought to carry the manure of the lord for two days with one cart using his own two oxen, the work to value 8 s., and he receives from the lord three meals of the above value each day; and so the work is worth 3 s. 3 d. clear.

¹ Shilling, a British measure of money traditionally worth $\frac{1}{20}$ of a pound (now $\frac{1}{20}$). [Ed.]

² Pence, smallest measure of British currency traditionally worth $\frac{1}{12}$ of a shilling (now $\frac{1}{10}$). "d" comes from Roman *denarius*. [Ed.]

"Services Due from a Villein, 1307," ed. S. R. Scargill-Bird, *Customs of Battle Abbey* (The Camden Society, 1887), 19-23.

And he should find one man for two days to mow the meadow of the lord, who can mow an estimated one acre and a half: the value of mowing one acre is 6 d.; and the total is 9 d.; and he receives for each day three meals of the above value, and thus the mowing is worth 4 d. clear.

And he ought to collect and carry that same hay which he has mowed; the value of the work is 3 d. And he has from the lord two meals to one man worth $1\frac{1}{2}$ d.; thus the work is worth $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. clear.

And he ought to carry the hay of the lord for one day with one cart and three animals of his own, the price of the work is 6 d.; and he has from the lord three meals worth $2\frac{1}{2}$ d.; and thus the work has a value of $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. clear.

And he ought to carry in the autumn beans or oats for two days with one cart and three of his own animals, the price of the work is 12 d.; and he has from the lord three meals of the above price for each day, and thus the work is worth 7 d. clear.

And he ought to carry wood from the woods of the lord to the manor house for two days in summer with one cart and three of his own animals, the price of the work is 9 d.; and he receives from the lord for each day three meals of the above price. And so the work is worth 4 d. clear.

And he ought to find one man for two days to cut heath, the price of the work is 4 [d.]; and he will have three meals for each day of the above price; and so the lord loses if he receives the work 1 d.; and thus that cutting is worth nothing to the work of the lord.

And he ought to carry the heath that he has cut, the price of the work is 5 d.; and he receives from the lord three meals of the price of $2\frac{1}{2}$ d.; and thus the work is worth $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. clear.

And he ought to carry to Battle [Abbey] two times in the summer half a load of grain each time, the price of the work is 4 d.; and he will receive in the manor each time one meal worth 2 d.; and thus the work is worth 2 d. clear.

The sum of the rents, with the price of the chickens is 2 s. 4 d.; the sum of the value of the work is 2 s. $3\frac{1}{2}$ d.; owed from the said John per year. . . .

And it must be noted that all the aforesaid villeins may not marry their daughters nor have their sons tonsured, nor can they cut down timber growing on the lands they hold, without the personal approval of the bailiff or servant of the lord, and then for building and no other purpose.

And after the death of any one of the aforesaid villeins the lord will have as a heriot the best animal that he had; if, however, he had no living beast, the lord will have no heriot, as they say.

The sons or daughters of the aforesaid villeins will give to enter the tenement after the death of their ancestors as much as they gave in rent per year.